

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL JIM RICE, U.S. ARMY
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROGRAM, VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 1:00 P.M. EST DATE: WEDNESDAY,
DECEMBER 12, 2007

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MR. : Very good. So I'll turn it over to Colonel Rice for his
opening statement.

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): All right,
sir. Thank you very much.

COL. RICE: All right, well thank you for inviting me to talk to you
about the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program. I'm honored to lead the U.S. Army
Wounded Warrior Program and to serve the nation's severely wounded, injured and
ill soldiers and their families. This progress is here to serve those who have
given so much to this country through their service.

The U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program follows the war ethos, "I will
never leave a fallen comrade." We assist and advocate for severely wounded
soldiers and their families for as long as they need us, wherever they are
located. The primary way the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program makes a
difference in their lives -- in the lives of the severely wounded soldiers and
their families, is by taking the time to really listen to their needs.

Every soldier in this Program is assigned a specialist who gives them
personalized recovery assistance in navigating government and non-profit
organizations on their behalf to ensure they get the help and support their
families need. Our soldiers gave us their best, and we now remain committed to
giving them ours.

The U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program is part of a larger Army
initiative that is focusing on providing more comprehensive services to our
soldiers and their families. We are in the forefront of an important
transformation that is building the health care model for the future for the
military's wounded warriors.

For more information on this program, or to obtain support services,
any soldier or his loved one can call: 1-800-237-1336. They can also visit our
website at: www.aw2.army.mil, where I recently posted the first entry in our
new Army Wounded Warrior blog. Please take the time to learn more about the
Program, our dedicated staff, and the severely wounded soldiers we serve. As
director of the Army Wounded Warrior Program, my duty is also my honor, and I
will continue to work every single day to make sure that no soldier is left
behind.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Colonel James Rice with us on the Bloggers Roundtable this morning. He's director of the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program.

And Andrea (sp), why don't you get us started.

Q Okay. Colonel Rice, first of all, thank you for your service. We really are indebted to you for your service to the country, as well as what you are doing with this Program.

COL. RICE: Well, thank you, ma'am.

Q How many wounded warriors are we assisting at this time?

COL. RICE: The total number in the Army Wounded Warrior Program is just under 2,400.

Q Just under 2,400. Okay. And is that -- is that an all-time high at this particular time, or that an average, would you say, or?

COL. RICE: No, that number -- that is as many wounded warriors as we've had in the Program since initiation.

Q Okay. All right. I do have a follow-up question but I'm going to let others go ahead and then I'll -- I'll jump in afterwards if there is time. Thank you. MR. HOLT: Okay.

And, Ward.

Q Hey, Colonel. Ward Carroll from Military.com --

COL. RICE: Sir, how are you?

Q -- and -- (inaudible) -- have Vince Patton (sp) here with me, who's our community outreach guy. Why this program at this time? It sort of strikes me -- as you said, the warrior ethos is, "I will never leave a fallen comrade" -- that is something that would have been in place as soon as you stepped off the line-of-departure. Is this a function of some of the negative things that have happened in recent years?

COL. RICE: It's not, really. The Program's been in existence since 2004. You may recognize it as the Disabled Soldiers Support System, which is its initial name. But we -- we're not focusing on the disabilities, we're focusing on what our soldiers can do.

As I said, it's been in place since 2004 and has grown since then. And it's the -- it's a program for the most severely wounded, and I'm not sure I made that distinction early on. It's those soldiers who are 30 percent or more disabled, as found by the Army disability system.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And Andrew.

Q Colonel, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from the Military Observer. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with us.

COL. RICE: Good afternoon, Andrew.

Q Sir, the other day on the news -- all over the news, had the picture and the article about the young Marine who had been -- you know, whose head was so violently disfigured and burned. What happens with -- after your Program, is there a way to keep these young men, when they come out of your program, from falling in the cracks before they get to the VA? Or are you able to take them back when the VA drops the ball?

COL. RICE: Now, I missed the first part of your -- the first part of your question, but if the question -- if the question is, "Do we ever leave them?," the answer is, no.

What we do is we identify a soldier -- who, as I said, is either 30 percent, or is likely to be -- we identify them early on; we make the connection as soon as that soldier arrives at a treatment facility; and our soldier family management specialist, our care manager, establishes a relationship with that soldier and family that continues as long as it takes. And that's the phrase we're emphasizing these days, it's "as long as it takes."

So even after that soldier leaves the hospital; goes through the medical board process; makes a determination to either continue on active duty or active reserve, or departs the service and joins their civilian communities, we're still with them to help them through vocational rehabilitation, through the education process, and ensuring that they are fully employed to the greatest extent possible so that they're integral members of their community.

Q Let me rephrase my question -- and we have time for follow-up, I'm sure. When they come out of your program, and they're -- use an example, he's 40 percent disabled -- we hear more and more examples of the VA, take your 40 percent, and say "Not really, he's 10 or 12 percent," and take away all sorts of benefits to leave him basically out in the cold. Is there any sort of outreach where you go back to the VA and work on behalf of the soldier? I read this more and more as the war goes on.

COL. RICE: Sir, we do advocate for our soldiers, but the determination that's made by the physical disability agency, that -- before the soldier leaves the Army, as part of that board process, if they are 30 percent or greater, by that process, they are part of the Army Wounded Warrior Program. And if they have an issue with benefits that they're getting from any other agency, or if there is a -- if there's a non-profit that we think that that soldier can benefit from, that is our mission, is to advocate for that soldier to ensure that they're getting all the benefits that they deserve.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: So this is more than a transition program, sir?

COL. RICE: Yes, sir, it is. And a lot of folks are familiar with the term "seamless transition." And certainly that's part of our role, to ensure that as the soldiers making that transition -- whether it's the Veterans Affairs or any other organization that is contributing to that soldier's well-being, our

job is to make sure that they are getting those benefits, and that that fits what that family and soldier are looking for as we develop their -- the life-model that we're going to help coach them through. MR. HOLT: And I had a few other folks dial-in here.

Who else is on-line?

Q Mary Lou.

MR. HOLT: Hello? Yes? Okay, Mary Lou.

Q Oh, okay. Hi, Colonel Rice, this is Mary Lou. I'm a guest of the show. First of all, I just want to thank you and all involved, for the Army Wounded Warrior Program. I have been to the website to learn a little bit more about it. I'm flying up to Washington this Friday, along with a friend of mine, and we're going to be laying wreaths on the graves at Arlington. My brother was Army MIA, Vietnam 1970, and his remains were recently identified and buried in Arlington, and we're going to lay wreaths on his grave along with others.

But he wasn't left behind. And it's seems here, that with the program of Wounded Warriors, none of our troops are going to be left behind, in their care and their follow-up. Colonel Broome, though, the Pentagon chaplain, had invited us to the Pentagon Friday morning to meet and support the Wounded Warriors at an event that I believe starts around 10:30. I'm so thrilled to be able to do this, to thank them for their courage and their sacrifice. These are our heroes. And I don't know if you'll be there for this, but if you are, I would like to thank you personally for this. Will you be there for this?

COL. RICE: Ma'am, it's not on my calendar right now, but I will -- I will check the Pentagon schedule and I'll see if I can't meet you there.

Q Okay, our flight arrives around 9:00 a.m., and we're going to try to go directly to the Pentagon to -- he's going to meet us, to get passes and take us in, because I believe this starts at 10:30?

COL. RICE: As I said, ma'am, I'll have to check. It's not an event that I currently have on my calendar, but I will take a look.

Q Okay, well, thank you so much. This is a wonderful program, and I will be in touch further.

COL. RICE: Well, thank you, ma'am. And thank you for what you're doing.

Q You're welcome. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And Colonel, you mentioned there's a Wounded Warrior blog. What kind of topics are you -- do you cover on the blog?

COL. RICE: Well, I think there are going to be a lot of topics like we're discussing here today, that -- where we are with the Wounded Warrior Program; how folks can help wounded warriors; just the, you know, the different issues that come up, that relate to wounded warriors and their families.

MR. HOLT: Just as an average, sir, what are some of the -- some of the more common problems that you're finding that can be -- that we should be

looking out for and address with those that are -- are the wounded warriors around us?

COL. RICE: Well, some of the other commentators, or the questioners have hit on those already. It's the bureaucracies that we work in, in DOD and the other federal agencies, some of the non-profits, it can really be a challenge for the soldiers and their families, particularly if they -- because they've had a traumatic event in their lives. And we just want to help them navigate through the bureaucracy within DOD and outside of DOD with some of the expertise that we have.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

And do we have any follow-up questions?

Q Yeah. Jack?

MR. HOLT: Yes.

Q Hey, Bruce McQuain, QandO. Sorry I joined late, Colonel. And you may have covered this, but I'm just interested as a matter of curiosity, why the 30 percent threshold?

COL. RICE: Well, the -- that's a great question, and it comes up frequently. And the 30 percent is the level of disability rating above which the soldier and his family can maintain the TRICARE benefit, a retirement benefit throughout their retired life.

Q Oh, I see. Okay. That makes sense.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q I have a follow-up for you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sure.

Q With regard to the budget, what is the budget for the Wounded Warrior Program, and is this -- who allocates this? Is this appropriated directly by Congress, or is this a part of the overall Defense budget?

COL. RICE: The Army Wounded Warrior Program actually is a part of the adjutant general directorate within Human Resources Command. So our budget is part of the Human Resources Command budget, but we have commitments from the -- from the most senior leaders in the Army that the budget of the Army Wounded Warrior Program will remain a priority. We've got that commitment and we're going to continue to run with that. Q Do you have any dollar figures at this time -- what the budget is right now?

COL. RICE: Ma'am, all I can say is that we don't have -- we don't have a challenge in the Army Wounded Warrior Program, in meeting our budget requirements. Q All right, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Anyone else?

Q Hi, this is Bart Bigner (sp), with the Veterans Home in California in Yountville. And we're working on a program we call "Pathway Home," which is a returning veterans counseling of a family, and family counseling, and related services. Does Wounded Warrior have a referral network for folks that would need or be interested in transition services like this?

COL. RICE: Sir, anybody who is aware of a soldier, or a family member of a wounded warrior, who has an issue, if they will contact: 1-800-237-1336, that is the Army Wounded Warrior Program. And whether they meet that 30 percent threshold, whether they're actually an Army wounded warrior or not, we'll ensure that the right person addresses that soldier's needs.

Q That's great. So any -- basically any soldier that's out there - - Guard, Reserve, active, any of those can call in on that number as long as they're an Army -- an Army alumni in the -- they'll be able to get some referral and assistance from that group?

COL. RICE: Yes, sir. That's true.

Q That's great.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Hey, Jack, this is Ward again.

Hey, Colonel, you mentioned the Program's been around since '04. How has it grown, changed, or refocused as a function of what's gone on in the war - - in terms of maybe retaining a guy that might have been administratively discharged before, or what are some of the lessons-learned that you've leveraged for the wounded warrior programs in recent years. COL. RICE: Well, that's (correct ?). Let me take the second part of that one first, about the "continue on active duty," because it's a -- it's a facet that we're proud of. There are just about 60 soldiers so far who, despite their -- despite being part of the Wounded Warrior Program, they're severe wounded, that they have chosen to remain on active duty. And the commitment of the Army G-1, the head of personnel, he is the one individual in the chain who can say no to a soldier who makes a request. And to-date, we have not turned down any soldier, no matter what the level of their injuries, who has requested to stay on active duty. We've accommodated every one of them.

More specifically to how the Program has morphed over the years, we have a staff of about 100 in the Army Wounded Warrior Program that includes soldier-family management specialist, our case managers who are dispersed across the country. And that wasn't the case originally. Originally they worked from here in headquarters in Alexandria. But wherever there is a significant population of wounded warriors, we have a soldier-family management specialist on the ground -- in military facilities, in VA facilities, both in the poly-trauma centers and in other VA-shared sites.

And that probably is the biggest change in the Program is the folks in the field who are face-to-face with those wounded warriors out in their communities.

MR. HOLT: All right. Anyone else?

All right, sir. Well, Colonel Jim Rice, the director of the Army Wounded Warrior Program, thank you very much for being with us, sir.

COL. RICE: That's been my pleasure. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And maybe we can speak again and get an update in a few weeks or a few months down the road?

COL. RICE: I'd be happy to. Any time that is convenient for you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. Thanks for joining us.

Q Great, thanks, Colonel.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you.

COL. RICE: I'd just like to say that, in closing, that the Army lives by the -- by the motto, "Never leave a fallen comrade," and the Army Wounded Warrior Program is built on that belief. This is the official Army program that takes care of those most severely wounded soldiers and their families, no matter the need, no matter how long it takes. They gave their best, and we're here to give them ours. Q Well, we certainly appreciate that.

Q Yes, we do.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. HOLT: All right. And once again, the Wounded Warrior hotline number: 1-800-237-1336.

COL. RICE: Yes, sir. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you.

END.